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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000334

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SUBJECT: ISTANBUL ANAVATAN PARTY REPEATING OLD POLITICAL STRATEGIES

Classified By: Consul General Sharon A. Wiener for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: Motherland Party (Anavatan) Istanbul Deputy Chairman Korhan Kongaz expects the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) will be banned and that early elections will result from the party's closure. Kongaz said a reconstituted AKP under a different name would be severely weakened and likely not do well in elections he expects will be held in the fall. Kongaz acknowledges that an AKP successor party under PM Erdogan could again come out on top in general elections, however he expects the judiciary or military to step in to stop the party from returning to power. The Istanbul branch of Anavatan will continue past electoral strategies, despite numerous defeats at the ballot box, according to Kongaz. Anavatan's failure to even consider new campaign strategies does not augur well for the party's electoral changes. END SUMMARY

12. (SBU) In a June 11 meeting, center-right Motherland Party (Anavatan) Istanbul Deputy Chairman for Foreign Affairs, Korhan Kongaz told us he was confident that the Constitutional Court would ban the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) from politics this summer. The Remaining deputies would call for early national elections this fall, which could be combined with local elections currently scheduled for March 2009. Kongaz was confident that the remnants of a banned AKP would form a new party; however he believes many members would desert the core. He insisted that the core of AKP is already fracturing; the primary example being the animosity between President Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan. According to Kongaz, the search for a new party is already underway. He said former AKP Parliament members Abdullatif Sener and Turhan Comez, and former CHP member and mayor of Sisli Mustafa Sarigul are planning to form a party. (COMMENT: The flamboyant Sarigul would be an unlikely partner to Sener and/or Comez since it would be unlikely that any one of these three political figures would accept less than the leadership position of a new party. END COMMENT).

13. (SBU) Kongaz expects early elections to be close; however a reconstituted AKP would be at a disadvantage since the public views Erdogan as the source of instability. They will punish Erdogan for injecting religion into public life; the final straw was his attempt to lift the headscarf ban at universities. Kongaz added the recent economic downturn will further discredit Erdogan, since his greatest electoral strength in the July 2007 elections was his management of a healthy economy. Diminishing electoral chances will help split the party, driving more AKP deputies into the arms of other parties, especially Anavatan, according to Kongaz.

¶4. (C) Kongaz stated that Anavatan will continue to follow a similar campaign strategy as in the past, despite a string of defeats. Anavatan will rely on public disenchantment with AKP to regain power, according to Kongaz. He acknowledged the AKP has a superior political organization, with a vast core of grassroots volunteers willing to campaign door-to-door for the party. This organization helped AKP win by large margins in 2002 and 2007. However, Kongaz is confident Turkish politics always result in changes and those in power cannot remain there forever. Kongaz was confident businesspeople would back Anavatan, since it is a pro-business party. Kongaz recognized that a new party under Erdogan could win a potential national election in the fall. If this occurs, however, the judiciary or military would intervene, he claims, to preserve secularism.

¶5. (SBU) Kongaz discounted any possibility of a merger between Anavatan and the center-right True Path Party (DYP). Bad blood still remains between the two parties after the failed merger in the lead up to the election in 2007. Kongaz blamed DYP for the failed merger, which caused all Anavatan candidates to be stripped from the ballot in 2007.

¶6. (SBU) The Istanbul branch of Anavatan will hold a party congress in June to map out a detailed plan to navigate anticipated early elections. Kongaz stated that former Istanbul Anavatan party chairman, Umit Ozerol, will be running for Mayor of Kartal, a district on the Asian side of Istanbul. If successful, Kongaz indicated Ozerol would appoint him deputy mayor. Kongaz told us that if Anavatan did win a national election, the government would begin again to

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protect freedoms and would not get involved in people lives. Kongaz also assured us that an Anavatan government would be pro-American, in sharp contrast to AKP, which publicly claims to be friendly to the U.S., but privately uses anti-American rhetoric.

¶7. (C) COMMENT: Despite expecting early elections, the Istanbul branch of Anavatan is doing little to prepare for a political contest, particularly in the area of grassroots organizing. Kongaz recognized Erdogan's superior campaigning skills; however it appears Anavatan is relying heavily on the changing political landscape to confront the AKP machine. Relying on the judiciary or military to "overturn" another potential AKP victory at the ballot box reduces Anavatan's incentive to aggressively combat AKP in the democratic arena. Kongaz's failure to address past mistakes and simply hope the public will embrace the party shows little promise that the Istanbul branch of Anavatan can contribute to building a stronger party.

WIENER